Against the Grain

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And They Were There -- United Kingdom Serials Group Conference

Editor

notorious for its slippage. That slippage stopped the order process for many more months than anticipated, a problem about which no one seemingly expressed concern.

Unlike **PALS**, **ExLibris' Aleph** better affords the opportunity to export bibliographic records at the point of order. For a small library that purchases material described by **Library of Congress** cataloging with bibliographic records obtained from **OCLC**, no reason exists for not implementing this now-standard routine. Amusingly, **SDLN** systems staff never seemed to understand the need for real-time export. They remained contrary in their efforts to implement anything other than a daily batch load.

Non-technical services staff raised all the usual non-technical services objections to point of order export, sometimes for good reason. **SDLN** systems failed to implement tables that automatically change order status from pre-order, on-order, post-order, etc. Occasional failure of technical services staff to rekey manually codes and to un-suppress after receipt proved problematic. Interlibrary Loan objected to setting the **OCLC** holdings byte prior to receipt. Perhaps the cost of ILL part-time student labor loomed larger than that of full-time technical services staff and the **OCLC** costs required to set the holding byte via a second, post-receipt **OCLC** search.

Standing order practices changed. For materials cataloged separately, staff input in **PALS** a serial record and to that record attached order records and item records to receive the titles. This practice collocated standing order receipts. Staff could also link the item record to its monographic record. With a series search, both the serial record and its corresponding monographic records displayed in the public catalog; the serial record offered a summary holdings display generated from the item records.

Aleph does not support this practice. Only one item record can be attached to one bibliographic record. Staff continues to input a serial standing-order record for its need for bibliographic control but then suppresses the record from public view. Staff then catalogs materials post-receipt. Most libraries in South Dakota have no previous practice of inputting series authority records.

One of the more difficult aspects of the conversion proved to be the least anticipated: the conversion from a first generation, text-based system to a third generation, graphical user interface **(GUI)** system. **PALS** offered an efficient, effective text-based ordering system with which staff had intimate familiarity. **Aleph** offers a windows interface requiring much pointing and clicking, seemingly all over the screen: top, bottom, left, right, and middle. Dexterity with a mouse, the order of points and clicks, faulty memory, less than adequate documentation and training, and a flaky implementation all conspired to encourage a transition from mouse to trackball and the introduction of RICE: rest, ice, compression, and elevation of lower arm, wrist, and hand. Some staff even became ambidextrous track ball converts.

SERIAL HOLDINGS

The conversion of serial holdings from **PALS** to **ExLibris Aleph** presented yet another labor intensive project. **PALS** had no holding record. It instead generated a holdings display with information gathered from the item records. With no holdings record, the library could not convert that which never existed. Instead, staff would key ANSI-style enumeration and chronology into an **ExLibris MARC** holding record.

The conversion did map enumeration and chronology from the **PALS** item record to the **ExLibris** item record. Like **PALS**, the **ExLibris** item record also functions as the check-in record. Each currently-received issue requires the creation of an item record. This record structure varies from other systems, like **III's Millenium**, which uses a separate check-in "card" and requires no item record for current periodicals.

A description of serials holdings procedures is appropriate at this point in order to elucidate the new work required of library staff to construct the holding record. To create holding records, staff reviews the **ExLibris** conversion of item records. At their best, these item records constitute detailed holdings: i.e., holdings at ANSI level four with both highest and lowest levels of enumeration and chronology. From these item record displays, staff input an ANSI level three summary holdings statement in a MARC 866 text field.

Most libraries input separate serial holding records for current issues, bound, microform, oversized, different locations, etc., rather than one holding record with multiple 866 fields. Regardless of the practice, currently-received statements for bound or microform titles may end with an "open hyphen." Items shelved in current periodicals may contain a free text field, "Library retains current issues until bound," or similar statement depending upon retention. Staff input location information into a MARC 852 field.

For periodicals, some libraries attach holdings for both paper and microform to the one bibliographic record describing the paper version. For a title held in paper, microform, and the ever ubiquitous electronic version, the public display in many libraries also consists of one bibliographic record describing the paper. Many libraries input the 856 field in just the bibliographic record, but **Aleph** does provide the option to input this field into both the bibliographic record and the holdings record.

Some catalogs contain no bibliographic records for electronic versions purchased from aggregators. Reference may manually maintain these titles on a Website in separate local lists, both an online journals list and database lists providing title and subject access. "Duplicate" bibliographic records for electronic versions confuse the patrons. It's better to have a stand-alone list, or so the reasoning goes.

CONCLUSIONS

God could create the world in six days because he had no legacy systems or bad data with which to work. Not so with conversion, which is simply that: conversion, not creation. The task relies upon data input using previous local, provincial, and sometimes seemingly insane practices. Ergo, the current public displays using current software and hardware reflect past practices. For example, item record displays contain both upper and lower level enumeration but only higher level chronology because, well, that's what the spine label said. Bending to demands of legacy systems and bad data, the most important task for conversion supervisors is to decide which conversion problems to ignore, for which there exists no dearth.

And They Were There

United Kingdom Serials Group Conference

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United Kingdom Serials Group Conference
3-5 April 2006, University of Warwick, UK

Report by **Fytton Rowland** (Loughborough University) and **Hazel Woodward** (Cranfield University)

Once again the **UKSG Conference** was of record size — about 650 delegates — and the **University of Warwick** is currently the only UK university that can accommodate it. Fortunately it is a very satisfactory venue! And as usual the **UKSG Committee** had put together an attractive programme, with a good mix of the usual suspects and unlikely candidates among the speakers. There seemed to be close to a majority of speakers from the USA in the main plenary sessions.

The first speaker, **Professor Carole Goble** from the School of Computer Science at the **University of Manchester**, works in bioinformatics providing systems to support

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researchers in genomics. Previously these workers had to compare data from many different sources manually in the course of their "in silico" research, and the "workflow" concept enables the different computational resources to be linked automatically. For **UKSG** tastes **Carole** was an iconoclast — she said she was a big fan of **Google**, didn't use serials and didn't use libraries! Of course, she did use both — like many academics she no longer visits the library but the electronic resources she uses are provided by the library, and e-journals are one of the resources that her system mines for data. Many of the other resources are not refereed journals, though — much computer science material comes from conferences, and much genomic data is deposited directly in databanks before being published in any form. She pointed out that in future journals will need to be designed to be read by machines as well as humans and alleged that the "collection community" — by which she meant librarians and publishers — has not caught up with the needs of e-scientists.

The final speaker, **Professor Peter Jacso** of the Department of Information and Computer Science at the **University of Hawaii**, was billed to speak on the "Endangered Database Species" but in fact gave two talks in succession, standing in for the advertised speaker on **Google**. He took issue with **Carole Goble's** affection for **Google**, but our impression was that he thought she was speaking of **Google Scholar**, when in fact she was admiring the **Google** search engine itself. **Peter** gave the conference a rousing sendoff with both his papers. In his first, he alleged that the large-scale digitisation of scholarly journal archives and the availability of open access to much material, especially abstracts and indexing records, calls into serious question the long-term survival of the commercial abstracting and indexing databases, especially those who have not modernised their operations and kept their quality control up to scratch. His second, more impromptu, talk was good knockabout stuff, reporting his investigations of the quality — or lack of quality — of **Google Scholar**, with a number of hilarious examples of its bloomers. Not quite the paper that the originally billed speaker on **Google** would have given!

So, two contrasting and fascinating speakers to top and tail the meeting, but plenty of other good stuff in between. Notably the Conference Dinner, held in the unlikely surroundings of the **National Motorcycle Museum** — plenty of good photo-opportunities during the pre-dinner drinks — and the Quiz, handled by **Diana Leitch** of **Manchester University Library** with her usual aplomb.

Among other speakers whose papers won applause was **Alexis Walkiers** of the **Université Libre de Bruxelles**, an economist who analysed the economic evolution of the scientific publication market, with clear proof of market imperfections and good (though not surprising) data on the price differentials between journals published by for-profit and not-for-profit publishers. Another was **Rick Anderson** of the **University of Nevada** at Reno, always a polished performer, asking "What Will Become of Us?" (librarians, that is), and concluding, among other things, that we will continue to buy the wrong things, and that library staffing will come under increasing pressure. Another speaker who broadly agreed with this was **Roger Schonfeld** of **Ithaka** — another economist — who felt that here was a great need for strategic management of the retreat from print. A more UK-oriented presentation came from **Jonathan Adams** of **Evidence Ltd**, a think-tank that had been responsible for much of the analysis of the data from the **2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)**, on "Research Assessment and UK Publication Patterns." This paper was unexpectedly topical, since the Chancellor of the Exchequer, **Gordon Brown**, had announced in his budget speech

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Little Red Herrings — Ah, Libraries: How I Love the Smell of ... Electronic Access?!

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

In the olden days, when we Baby-Boomers would walk into our university or college libraries we would pause just long enough to take in that wonderful smell of high grade cowhide leather and aging papyrus before rushing off to study. There was something about opening any leather bound edition of anything and being transported by the smell to some distant land, not unlike **Charles Swann** in **Marcel Proust's** famous French novel, *A La Recherché du Temps Perdu, Remembrance of Things Past*.

And that smell is rapidly becoming just that, a remembrance of things past. For the past three decades there's been a dramatic but quiet (natch) revolution taking place in libraries across the country, and it's not only changing the way we think about them, but also changing the way we read. When you walk into a modern library, you're just as likely to be greeted by the rather odd smell of ... electronic access.

Of course, computers are not new to librarians or libraries. As early as 1967, the coming revolution in the form of what is now referred to as **OCLC** was visible for all to see. While some lamented the loss of catalog cards, most dismissed them and their card catalogs gladly.

Being frustrated is one thing in life, a wise man once wrote, but getting what you want, that's when the real troubles begin. Computers ate their way into the life of libraries (and elsewhere) as quickly as ravenous termites into wood, and some would say with almost as much damage. In 1968 business spent zero dollars on automation. By the late 1990s, businesses were spending more than a *billion* annually. A very similar trend occurred in libraries. Whereas we once fought over whether to indent three spaces or four, we now argue about just how much longer we librarians will be required in our brave, new automated world. Now that's progress, eh?

"Computers ate their way into the life of libraries (and elsewhere) as quickly as ravenous termites into wood..."

In the last decade, libraries have moved farther into the electronic age. With the advent of the Internet, libraries now offer patrons *virtually* everything. It's now estimated that there are more than *seven billion* Web pages on the Internet. That's right, *billion* with a *"b."* If this seems high, do a search on **Google** (almost any topic will work) and just about all of them come up, every time. This, too, we are told, is progress. We also don't seem to mind that none of the major search engines — **Google**, **Hotbot**, **Yahoo!**, etc. — search all the Web. Indeed, none of them search more than about 35% of it. We hear all the time that *everything* is on the Web. But with search failure rates like this, how can we tell? Doesn't matter.

The good news is that almost anything is on the Web: stock prices, medical information, home and gardening news, some of it is even accurate. The bad news is that any fool can put something on the Web and, with billions of pages out there, apparently most have. Most of us would have called it professional malpractice if a reference librarian gave to a patron thousands of books, articles, ads for erectile dysfunction and pornography with little guidance. Today, we call that a successful search. We've come a long way, baby!

To argue that all Internet sites are the same information-wise is as silly as saying, "My mother, drunk or sober." There *is* a difference, and patrons must be able to tell it before surfing too far on the Web. Trouble is, not many can, but that, too, is okay, because this is progress at its electronic best!

To dispute the value of the Web is to risk being called a Luddite so let me hasten to say how progressive it all seems. Like thousands of other good libraries, we offer our patrons access to proprietary databases containing information written by today's best scholars. These databases contain literally millions of articles, many of which are full text. Gone are the days of worrying about when the library is open. Access to electronic journals is open all the time. Of course it does cost two arms, both legs and your first-born to provide these services, but we're talking sheer, unadulterated progress here.

All of this fits in perfectly with our never-wait, sound-bite mentality because our users have access to all this material whenever they want it, wherever they want it. With wireless access, students have access anywhere in our building or a coffee shop in Charlotte! If that isn't progress, what is?

Of course there are downsides to be sure. Cost has already been mentioned. Now comes bad news about a sharpe decline in reading. It appears from a few recent studies that not only are 18-24 year olds reading less, they are nearly to the point of not reading at all, down almost 20% points from a decade ago. *Decline in Reading* tells us that this age groups does not read books, plays, articles, newspapers or home work assignments. The good news is they do all have Driver's Licenses, cell phones and iPods, and use all three at the same time! In their defense, their lives are so much busier than our own.

It would appear, too, that recent studies on young children exposed to computers very early in life do not read well later, and may never overcome their acquired reading difficulties. Small price to pay, don't you think? Still other studies argue that we are now seeing generation after generation of young people who are less intelligent than their parents. Unfortunately their parents weren't all Mensa candidates either, so this could pose a problem later. But not to worry. Computers are everywhere and everything's on the 'Net! Reading, we'll surely soon learn, is very highly overrated.

Baby-boomers will look nostalgically on those sprawling libraries that had that wonderful smell of leather, assuming of course they are still around to be nostalgic about. Children of baby-boomers will now have yet one more reason to laugh at their parents, and this time not about bell-bottoms. Imagine the head-scratching that will ensue when those once hip parents say to their children, "Don't you just love the smell of old libraries?" and their children respond, "Yeah. They smell just like a new computer!"

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a few days before that any future **RAEs** after the 2008 one would be metrics-based, and that he was even going to consult about abandoning the **2008 RAE**, on which most UK universities have already expended much effort. **Jonathan's** analyses suggested that what **Gordon Brown** was proposing might well be very feasible in the sciences but would be much less easy to implement in the social sciences and humanities.

There was, of course, the usual excellent exhibition with all the major scholarly publishers and vendors demonstrating their wares and plying the delegates with wine and other goodies, many useful and specialised workshops and briefing sessions, and product presentations by the exhibitors who each get their five minutes of fame in the main auditorium. We all went home exhilarated by it all, and looking forward to next year's conference back at **Warwick**, which will be under the chairmanship of the **UKSG's** new Chair, **Paul Harwood** of **Content Complete**, who was elected during this meeting.